



BOOK'S 15TH YEAR FETED

Amid family, friends and fans, a Ventura author celebrates the 15th anniversary of her bilingual book with a literary quinceañera.

LOCAL, 3A



PHOTOS BY RICHARD QUINN/SPECIAL TO THE STAR

Author Amada Irma Pérez (right) whispers into the ear of Estrella Rodriguez, 7, as she reads Pérez's book "My Very Own Room: Mi Propio Cuartito" aloud at a quinceañera Sunday for the book at the Museum of Ventura County.

Read & celebrate

■ 'Quinceañera' marks book's 15th birthday

By Anne Kallas
Special to The Star

At the Museum of Ventura County, Amada Irma Pérez's book "My Very Own Room: Mi Propio Cuartito" was feted Sunday with a quinceañera — a traditional Latin American celebration of a girl's 15th birthday — with cake and music.

"This is the first literary quinceañera as far as we know," master of ceremonies Florencia Ramirez said. "The quinceañera is one of the most important celebrations on both sides of the U.S.-Mexican border. Many books are long out of print by 15 years, but 'My Very Own Room: Mi Propio Cuartito,' is still being taught in classrooms and read at bedtimes."

Pérez, of Ventura, said she "had the story bubbling inside me for years." As a teacher in the Ocean View School District in South Oxnard for years, she knew there weren't enough books in both English and Spanish.

A series of health crises left Pérez with more determination to write her book, but she didn't know where to start the process.

"I was an English major, but I didn't know how to write a book, especially a children's book, and I didn't know how to get it published," she said.

A writers conference at UC Santa Barbara in 1998 got her started, and eventually her book was published in 2000 by Children's Book Press, now an imprint of Lee & Low Publishers.



Rebecca Locher, 11 (left), and her sister Madeleine Locher, 13, read over "My Very Own Room: Mi Propio Cuartito" outside the Museum of Ventura County on Sunday before reading aloud to an audience.



Marco Pérez (left) and his father, Arturo Pérez, entertain the crowd Sunday at the Museum of Ventura County during a literary quinceañera for the book, "My Very Own Room: Mi Propio Cuartito," by Amada Irma Pérez, who is Marco's mother and Arturo's wife.

BOOK from 3A

One constant for Pérez ring the writing process is the help of her mother.

Consuelo Hernandez, who did all of the Spanish translations.

"We came to the United States when I was 5 years old, and my mother didn't know English. She taught me to read and write in Spanish. She taught me Spanish, and I taught her English," Pérez said as she hugged her mother.

In its 11th hardback printing and sixth paperback printing, "My Very Own Room: Mi Propio Cuartito" has won such awards as the Tomás Rivera Mexican-American Children's Book Award, the Américas Honor Book Award and the Parent's Guide to Children's Media Award.

Natalia Zizumbo, 15, of Exton, said she read "My Very Own Room: Mi Propio Cuartito" as a child.

"I really like the book. My preschool teacher would read it to us," Natalia said. "I like that it's bilingual. I know Spanish, but I've forgotten a lot of words."

Helping Pérez with the quinceañera were two groups of her friends — all women wearing white, with brightly colored shawls, embroidery or other accents.

One group, whom Pérez has dubbed the "madrinas" or godmothers, consists of friends who knew her when she was a teacher.

Kathleen Contreras, of Ventura, a fellow children's book author, explained that they all began teaching in the late 1970s.

"We are passionate about bilingual books," Contreras said.

The other group of women, of whom event announcer Ramirez is a member, are in the Women Who Write club. Pérez explained that the writers group of about eight women has been providing support and critiques of her work.

Since publishing "My Very Own Room: Mi Propio Cuartito," Pérez has written six more books, with the most recent — a biography of Los Angeles activist and politician Gloria Molina — due out April 25.

Hundreds of people crowded into the Martin V. and Martha K. Smith Pavilion at the museum in honor of Día del Niño — Children's Day in Mexico — to hear a group of children read the book.

Pérez then thanked all of the members of her family, including husband Arturo Pérez, who played the accordion, accompanied by son Marco Pérez. Her other son Nicholas Pérez was in the audience with her brother Raul Hernandez — one of five brothers who helped inspire "My Very Own Room: Mi Propio Cuartito."

"My brother keeps telling me, 'Without us you wouldn't have any stories to tell,'" Pérez said of Raul, one of her five younger brothers.

SUNDAY, APRIL 12, 2015 | 2-4 P.M.
MUSEUM OF VENTURA COUNTY
100 E. MAIN STREET, VENTURA, CA 93001

In honor of **Día del Niño/Día del Libro**
(Day of the Child/Day of the Book)
the community of Ventura County
is invited to a literary Quinceañera,
a special birthday party
for **Amada Irma Perez's** first picture book,
My Very Own Room/Mi Propio Cuartito

There will also be an exhibit of the story behind the story with artwork,
photos, manuscripts and memorabilia on First Friday (April 3, 6-8 p.m.)
along with the work of Dr. Kathleen Contreras in the Tool Room Gallery
of the Bell Arts Factory, 432 N. Ventura Avenue, Ventura.

